

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PEKING 01665 250047Z

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ACTION EA-14

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RSC-01 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-03 PM-07 NSC-07 SS-20 NSCE-00

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R 240845Z SEP 74

FM USLO PEKING

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2454

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 1665

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CH

SUBJECT: CHIANG CHING AND THE EMPRESS WU

REF: A. PEKING 1405; B. PEKING 1656

1. IN MID-AUGUST WE NOTED EFFORTS BY CHIANG CHING TO IMPROVE THE IMAGE OF EMPRESS WU OF THE TANG DYNASTY AND SPECULATED THAT THROUGH THIS SHE HOPED TO GIVE LEGITIMACY TO HER OWN POLITICAL ROLE. USLO HAS NOW ACQUIRED A COPY OF PEKING UNIVERSITY'S "HSUEH PAO" NO 4. DATED AUGUST 20, 1974, WHICH INCLUDES AN ARTICLE ON EMPRESS WU JUSTIFYING HER HISTORICAL ROLE AND ARGUING THE CASE THAT SHE WAS A "LEGALIST" IN GOOD STEAD WHO FOUGHT AGAINST THE CONSERVATIVES/CONFUCIANISTS.

2. "HSUEH PAO" CONCEDES AT THE OUTSET THAT THE EMPRESS WU IS A CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE WHO SOME CONSIDERED TO BE A "WISE RULER." IT DESCRIBES THE EMPRESS AS A REFORMER RANGED AGAINST A GROUP WHO WERE SATISFIED WITH THE RESULTS OF EARLIER STRUGGLES AND WHO HAD BECOME OBSTACLES TO PROGRESS BECAUSE THEY DID NOT WANT
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PEKING 01665 250047Z

MORE REFORM. HER WELL-KNOWN HARSH TREATMENT OF HER RIVALS IS

EXCUSED ON THE GROUND THAT THEY WERE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONSERVATIVES. THE EMPRESS IS PORTRAYED CARRYING ON A CONTINUAL BITTER STRUGGLE WITH HER OPPONENTS--INCLUDING AN OPEN REBELLION BY A REGIONAL OFFICIAL AND PLOTTING IN THE PALACE AFTER HER HUSBAND DIED--BUT SHE EMERGES VICTORIOUS TO CARRY OUT LEGALIST REFORMS IN POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND CULTURE. IN POLITICS SHE IS SAID TO HAVE BROADENED THE BASE OF OFFICIAL RECRUITMENT AND EDUCATION TO COMMONERS AND IN ECONOMICS EMPHASIZED AGRICULTURE AND PARTICULARLY MILITARY UNITS IN BORDER REGIONS ENGAGING IN AGRICULTURE. HER CULTURAL ACHIEVEMENTS ARE NOT MENTIONED.

3. IN THE LAST PART OF THE ARTICLE, THE AUTHOR CONCEDES THAT THE EMPRESS WAS A FLAWED RULER AND COULD NOT SOLVE THE CONTRADICTIONS OF THE SOCIETY AT THE TIME. IN PARTICULAR, HER SUPPORT OF BUDDHAISM WAS SAID TO BE EXCESSIVE, THUS INCREASING THE BURDEN ON THE PEOPLE AND ULTIMATELY CAUSING THEM TO REBEL AGAINST HER.

4. WHILE OBVIOUSLY PART OF THE EFFORT TO REFURBISH EMPRESS WU'S REPUTATION, THIS ARTICLE SEEMS A BIT TENTATIVE IN ITS PRAISE OF EMPRESS WU. THE AUTHOR COMES DOWN FIRMLY IN THE EMPRESS' FAVOR, BUT SHE IS NOT EXTRAVAGANTLY PRAISED. GIVEN CHIANG CHING'S IMPORTANCE ON THE CULTURAL SCENE, A SEQUEL DETAILING THE EMPRESS' REFORMS IN CULTURE COULD MAKE FASCINATING READING. POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF HIGH-LEVEL INTEREST IN THIS ARTICLE, THE RECENT ISSUE OF "HSUEH PAO" WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY SOLD OUT IS NOW BACK IN THE BOOKSTORES IN LARGE NUMBERS.

5. COMMENT: THE "HSUEH PAO" ARTICLE CLEARLY IS A PART OF THE CURRENT EMPHASIS ON WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP. WE HAVE ALREADY NOTED CZECH REPORTS THAT WOMEN ARE TO BE PLACED IN DEPUTY LEADERSHIP ROLES WITHIN THE BUREAUCRACY, A STORY WHICH SEEMS TO BE BORNE OUT BY RECENT APPOINTMENTS (REF B). CHIANG CHIN'S OWN ROLE APPEARS TO BE CHANGING JUDGING FROM RECENT APPEARANCES, PARTICULARLY NCNA'S ACCOUNT OF MRS. MARCOS' ATTENDANCE AT A SEPTEMBER 22 PEKING OPERA PERFORMANCE WHICH WAS DESCRIBED AS BEING "HELD BY THE CULTURAL GROUP UNDER THE STATE COUNCIL ENTRUSTED BY MADAM CHIANG CHINA", SUGGESTING SHE HAS ASSUMED A STATE FUNCTION. WE THUS SEE THE "HSUEH PAO" ARTICLE AS A PART

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PEKING 01665 250047Z

OF A PATTERN WHICH IS EMERGING. ONE MESSAGE DOES SEEM CLEAR. JOCKEYING FOR POSITION IN THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE CONTINUES. BRUCE

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